

# Newspapers at the Library of Congress

Bringing Method to the Madness...



Mark Sweeney, Library of Congress  
April 21, 2005

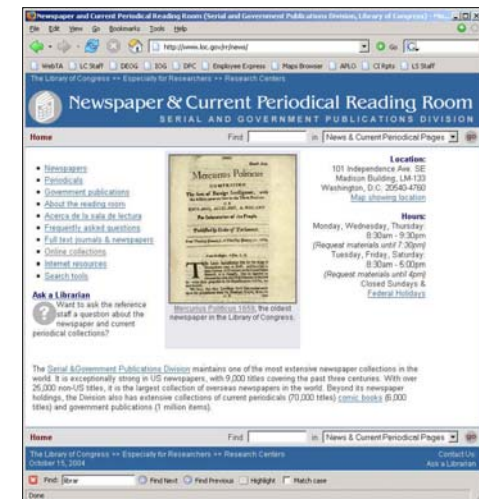





# Mission

- ◆ LC Mission:
  - To make its resources available and useful to the Congress and the American people
  - To sustain and preserve a universal collection of knowledge and creativity for future generations
- ◆ Legislative acts to support newspaper collection
  - May 1789 – 1 newspaper per Congressman
  - 1865 – Congress establishes subscription funding
  - 1874 – Congress requests 2 papers “of different politics” from every state be added to collections

# Service Today

- ◆ Newspaper and Current Periodical Reading Room - <http://www.loc.gov/rr/news/>
  - 1 million loose issues
  - 30,000 bound volumes
  - 500,000 positive copy microfilm reels (available to loan)
  - 65 hrs/week public reading room
  - Digital reference support via QuestionPoint (Ask-a-Librarian)



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- ◆ 1800-1900 - Of Fires and False Starts
    - or “the First Hundred Years are Hardest”
  - ◆ 1901-1939 – Development and Consolidation
    - or “Will We Ever Have Room For What We Asked For?”
  - ◆ 1940-2004 – Technological Revolution
    - or “How Do You Catalog and Preserve 300 Yrs Worth of Paper??”
  - ◆ 21<sup>st</sup> Century...- The Brave New Digital World
    - Or “Newspapers Are <Really> Hard...”

# 1800-1900: Fires and False Starts



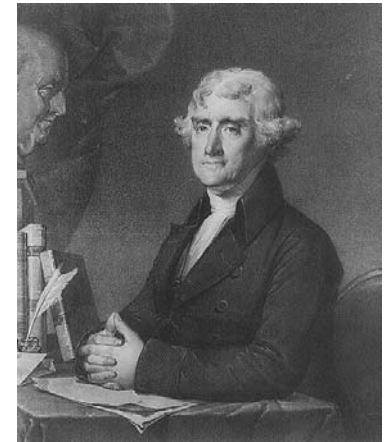


# 1800-1900: Fires and False Starts



*...were it left to me to decide whether we should have a government without newspapers, or newspapers without a government, I should not hesitate a moment to prefer the latter. But I should mean that every man should receive those papers and be capable of reading them.*

-Thomas Jefferson



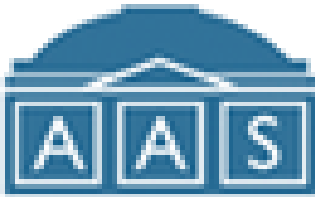
# 1800-1900: Fires and False Starts



Ainsworth Rand Spofford  
Librarian of Congress, 1864-1897

# Spofford's Legacy

- ◆ 1865 – appropriations to subscribe
- ◆ Rebuild pre-1801 collections
- ◆ Exchanges





# Space...the [initial] frontier

- ◆ Access
- ◆ Storage

*“Growth of newspaper collection outpaces available space. Librarian reports:...there is no longer even the possibility even of shelving half the issues...accumulate with such rapidity that **no device yet invented** will long avail to produce them when wanted.”*

Librarian Spofford's report to Congress, 1897.

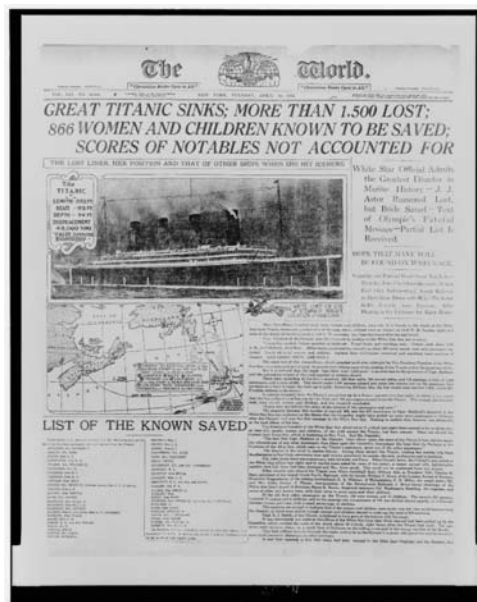




Thomas Jefferson Building, LC

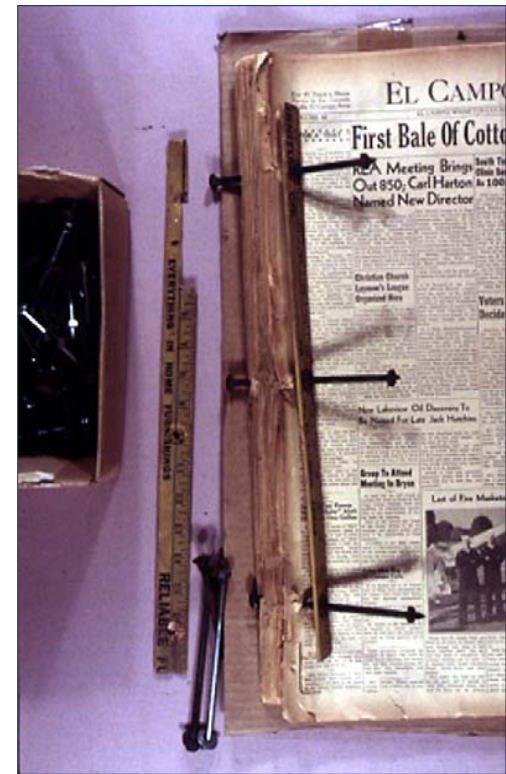
# Consolidation, 1900-1939

- ◆ 1900 – 22,000 volumes (increasing foreign)
- ◆ 1902, 1904 – Checklists published



# Material Concerns

- ◆ Deterioration
- ◆ Paper – bad, worse, worst





# Management Concerns

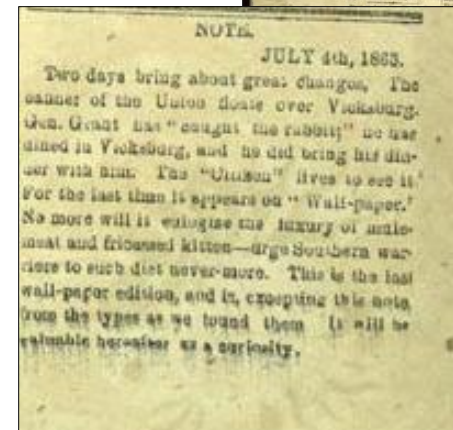
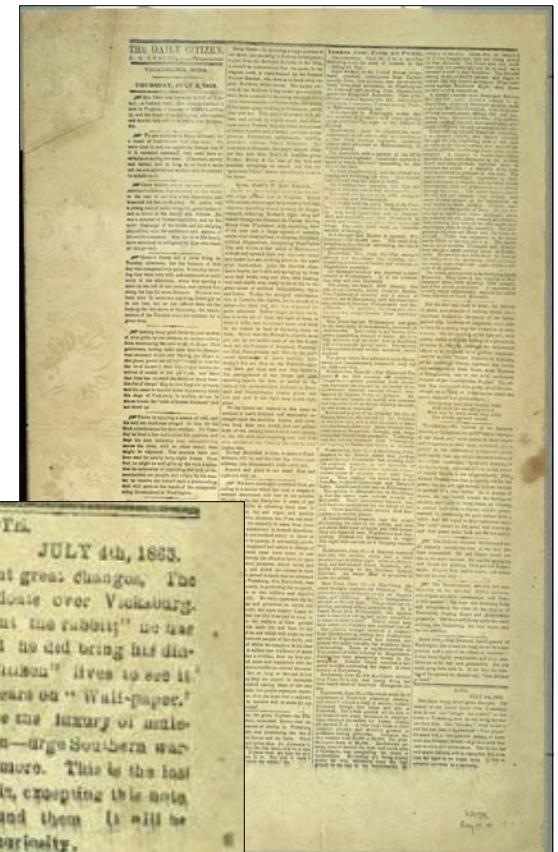
- ◆ The Librarian reports:

*“...newspapers are piled upon the floor filled aisles and alcoves of seven of the nine decks of the south stacks. The unbound mass, which could be estimated only by tons, occupied three large rooms...it was piled upon the floor 6 feet deep.” (1902)*



# Building the Historical Record

- ◆ 18<sup>th</sup> c. NY and London
- ◆ Early California
- ◆ Papers of the Confederacy
- ◆ Photostats of primary material





# Wear and Tear



- ◆ 1915 = 52,000 volumes
  - 7641 circulated
- ◆ 1940 = 100,000 volumes
  - 63,000 circulated
  - 186,000 unbound issues served

# 1920-1940: More Room!



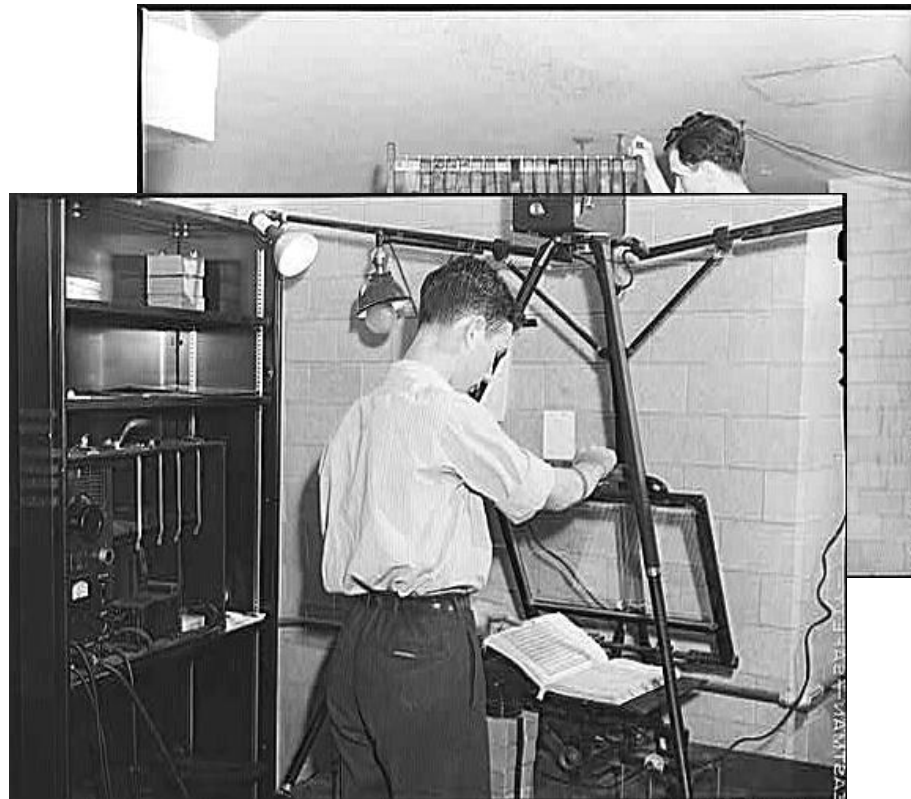
John Adams Building (Annex), LC

## ◆ The Librarian reports:

*“The difficulty in preserving the files in their present unbound condition is obvious. The wear while in use, chances of mutilation, and the danger of loss of copies, are all greatly increased. Meanwhile the demand for these files is continuous. Unless relief can be found from the existing situation we are threatened with serious losses and gaps in our greatest newspaper collections.” (1916)*

# 1930s: New Technologies to Meet the Need

## ◆ Preservation, Access, Space





# 1940s: Production and Gathering Information

- ◆ Production microfilming established
- ◆ *Newspapers in Microfilm:  
A Union Checklist*

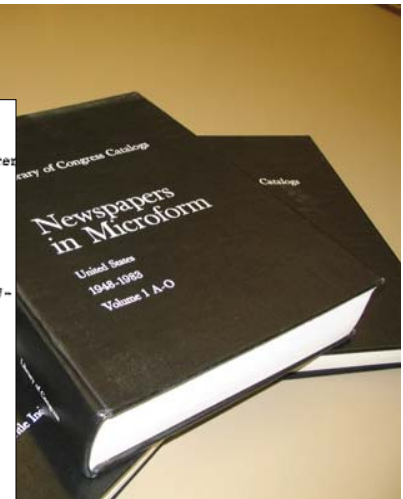


Grand Rapids daily enquirer. N 19, 1855-My 1, 1857. d  
Merged with Grand Rapids herald, 1855-My 1857, to form Grand Rapids daily enquirer and herald.  
Suspended publication Ap 9-25, 1856.  
McP m 1855-1857  
MI s 1855-1857  
MIGr s 1855-1857  
UnM m 1855-1857

Grand Rapids daily enquirer and herald. My 1857-Je 1863. d, ir  
Frequency varies: irregular, 1860-1863.  
Continues Grand Rapids daily enquirer, and Grand Rapids herald, 1855-My 1857.  
Continued by Grand Rapids Democrat.  
McP m 1857-My 1861  
MI s 1857-My 1861  
MIGr s 1857-1861  
UnM m 1857-My 1861

Grand Rapids daily leader. F 14, 1879-My 30, 1880. d  
Continued by Evening leader.  
McP m 1879-1880  
MI s 1879-1880  
MIGr s 1879-1880  
UnM m 1879-1880

Grand Rapids Democrat. Je 1863-Ja 26, 1902. d  
Title varies: Daily morning Democrat.  
Continues Grand Rapids daily enquirer and herald.  
Continued by Evening post Democrat.  
McP m 1865-1902  
MI s 1865-1897  
MIGr s 1865-1891  
UnM m s 1865-1902





# 1951, Reality and Reason



- ◆ Increased acquisition
- ◆ Preservation microfilming
- ◆ 30 % increase in 10 yrs
- ◆ Library authorizes disposal of short runs, ad hoc
- ◆ Storage crisis continued



# 1950s and 60s: Critical Mass

(or “self-sustaining chain reactions”)



- ◆ Redefining “building the nation’s collection”
  - Define collection policy
  - Division of labor across libraries
  - Cooperative programs
  - Coordinated preservation activities
  - Reduce duplicative effort

# 1970s-present: Cooperative Programming

- ◆ MARC
- ◆ NEH, LC, and You!
  - USNP
  - CONSER

